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## EPA defends up-coming Records of Decision

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By Canda Harbaugh, The Western News

Environmental Protection Agency officials spoke about the risk assessment process and the science of current toxicity studies at Tuesday night's meeting, but attendees seemed more interested in why Records of Decision are being pursued on Operable Units 1 and 2 before the agency has results from the studies.

The comment period for the proposed clean-up plans for the former export plant, OU1, and the former screening plant, OU2, is scheduled to end Dec. 16. The EPA hopes to finalize the ROD and get started on clean up next year.

Attendees voiced concern that once a ROD is finalized and the remedy put in place that the EPA will not return even if future science reveals that the remedy was not protective of human health.

"We feel, in a way, we're being pushed toward a Record of Decision that may limit our options later on," Abe Troyer said during the Q-and-A portion of the meeting. "We'd like to hear more about that I think."

Helen Dawson, EPA chief of science policy in the Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response, assured the audience that after EPA implements a ROD it is required by law to re-evaluate the site at a minimum of every five years to make sure remedies are still effective.

Troyer asked if the EPA will respond if its studies later reveal that Libby Amphibole, the unique asbestos fiber that contaminates the area, is more toxic than chrysotile asbestos, the fiber that EPA bases its science on.

"If we find out later that there might be a significantly higher toxicity component to our fiber here," Troyer said, "do we still have the opportunity to get a (new) calculation later on into our O&M (Operations and Maintenance fund) and everything else that is going on?"

Dawson replied, "Absolutely, yes."

Troyer echoed a concern that local governments and property owners continue to have - that once RODs are in place and when O&M funds



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eventually dry up, locals will be left with the expense of cleaning up asbestos that was left behind in buildings and the ground.

Libby city officials have told the EPA through the months that it is against the agency issuing a ROD on the city-owned OU1 property before it has a toxicity assessment.

Dawson and Libby team leader Victor Ketellapper kept in line with EPA's longstanding argument at Tuesday's meeting, saying that there is an immediate risk that cannot wait for toxicity studies to come back.

"We need to do clean up work to take people out of harm's way at this point," Ketellapper said. "We have to take care of the things we know right now. It may not be the final solution but we can't sit back and say, 'Let's wait 10 years. Let's wait until all the studies are done.'"

Ketellapper pointed out that the EPA is taking a conservative approach to clean ups by breaking all exposure pathways so that, in theory, the public will have no contact with asbestos.

Dawson said that a ROD is a required document that explains the risk and describes why tax payer money is being used. Clean ups over the years have been implemetned through interim decisions called removal actions.

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